

Remarks in Lee's Summit, Missouri
September 7, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming.

Audience members. Four more years!
Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you all very much for coming this morning. We're starting a bus trip here in your important State, and a great place to start right here in Lee's Summit. I appreciate you coming out.

And I want to thank the good folks here at Lee's Summit High for opening up this beautiful facility. I want to thank Tony Stansberry, who is the superintendent, and John Faulkenberry, who is the principal. I want to thank all the teachers who are here for teaching. I want to thank the students who are here. Listen, study more than you watch TV.

Thanks for coming out to say hello. I'm here to ask for your vote. I think you've got to get out amongst the people and give them a reason why, and that's what I'm here to do today and to ask for that vote. We carried Missouri last time, and with your help, we'll carry it this time.

I'm sorry Laura is not with me today.

Audience members. Aw-w-w!

The President. Yes, I know. [Laughter] When I asked her to marry me, she said, "Fine, I will, so long as I don't ever have to give a political speech." [Laughter] I said, "Okay." [Laughter] Fortunately, she didn't hold me to the promise. She did a magnificent job last week in New York City. I'm not surprised. She's a great person, a wonderful wife, great mom. I'm going to give you some reasons to put me back in, but perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura has 4 more years as the First Lady.

I appreciate my runningmate, Dick Cheney. He's a fine guy. I admit he doesn't have the prettiest hairdo in the race. [Laughter] I didn't pick him for his hair. [Laughter] I picked him because he can get the job done.

I want to thank my friend Kit Bond, the United States Senator from the State of Missouri, for his leadership. Put him back in there for 6 more years. Reelect this good man. And he's working with a good fellow in Jim Talent, the other United States Senator from Missouri. I really appreciate working with him. I also appreciate working with Congressman Sam Graves, who is with us today.

I wish Jeanne Patterson all the best in her run for the United States Congress. Chris Byrd is here. Madame Mayor is with us today, Mayor Karen Messerli. I appreciate her coming. Madame Mayor, I'm honored you're here. Thanks for taking time to be here today. Appreciate your support. Fill the potholes. [Laughter] I want to thank Mark Wills for being here, the country and western singer.

I want to thank all the grassroots activists who are here. These are the people who are out putting up the signs and making the phone calls and registering the voters. I particularly urge you to register people to vote over the next weeks. See, it's really important in this country to vote. I want the high school kids who are here to understand, if you live in a free country, I believe you need to vote. I believe you need to participate. So make sure you go register to vote, and I want to thank the people here who are registering people to vote.

And when you register people to vote, remember that example Zell Miller set the other night. There are plenty of Democrats who are coming our way, plenty of people who understand if you put Dick Cheney and me back in office, this country will be safer, stronger, and better for every American.

I'm looking forward to this campaign. I'm looking forward to continuing to travel your State and all across the country. I'm going

to tell people where I stand, what I believe, and where I'll lead this country.

I believe every child can learn and every school must teach. That's why we've raised the standards. That's why we believe we ought to measure early and correct problems before they're too late. That's why I believe we ought to stop this practice of just shuffling kids through school whether they can read or write or not. We're closing the achievement gap here in America, and we're not turning back.

I believe we have a moral responsibility to honor our seniors with good health care. When I got elected, I told the people that I'd try to strengthen Medicare. See, the old system was working fine for a while, but medicine changed and Medicare didn't. For example, they pay about \$100,000 for heart surgery but not the prescription drugs necessary to prevent the heart surgery from happening. That didn't make sense for our seniors, and it certainly doesn't make sense for our taxpayers. So I led the United States Congress. We strengthened Medicare. We're helping our seniors, and we're not turning back.

I believe in the energy, innovation, and spirit of America's workers and small-business owners, farmers and ranchers. And that is why we unleashed that spirit with the largest tax cut in a generation. We've overcome a lot. You know, I like to say this economy is strong and getting stronger. I say so because I know where we have come from. We've endured a recession, corporate scandals, a terrorist attack. And yet, this economy is growing. It's growing because our workers are great. It's growing because the small-business sector of America is strong. It's growing because our economic stimulus plan is working.

Last Friday, the jobs report for August showed we added 144,000 new jobs. That's 1.7 million over the last 12 months. The national unemployment rate is 5.4 percent. That's fully a point below the peak last summer. It is lower than the average rate of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

I believe a President must confront problems, not pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. I believe the most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. If America shows weakness or uncertainty in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This will not happen on my watch.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. I'm running for President with a clear and positive plan to build a safer world and a more hopeful America. I'm running with a compassionate conservative philosophy that Government should help people improve their lives, not try to run their lives. And I believe this Nation wants steady, consistent, principled leadership, and that is why, with your help, we're going to win a great victory in November.

Listen, the world in which we live and work is a changing world. You know, the generation of our dads and granddads was one where the male worked outside the home and generally at one job and one career, therefore, had one health care plan and one pension plan. This world of ours has changed. The workforce has changed. Many women not only work inside the home; they work outside the home. And people are changing jobs quite frequently here in America, and they're changing careers.

Yet the most fundamental systems, the Tax Code and health coverage and pension plans and worker training, were created for the world of yesterday, not the world of tomorrow. We're going to transform those systems. We will change those systems so all citizens are equipped and prepared and thus truly free to make your own choices so you can pursue your dreams.

Any hopeful society must be a society that keeps the economy moving forward, and I've got a plan. To create more jobs in America, America must be the best place in the world to do business. To create more jobs, we must reduce the regulation on our small businesses. To create more jobs, we

must stop the junk lawsuits that threaten small businesses. The cost to our economy of litigation is conservatively estimated to be over \$230 billion a year.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Now, listen, I understand my opponent changes positions a lot, but for 20 years he's been one of the trial lawyers' most reliable allies in the Senate. We have a difference of opinion. He's consistently voted against legal reform that would protect workers and entrepreneurs. His fellow lawyers have responded with millions of dollars in campaign donations. I have another view. I disagree with his position. I am for ending junk lawsuits. Personal injury lawyers should not get richer at the expense of hard-working Americans.

To keep jobs here in America, Congress must get my energy plan passed. It's a plan that encourages conservation. It's a plan that encourages renewables like ethanol and biodiesel. It is a plan that encourages clean coal technology. It's a plan that uses our resources wisely. It is a plan that makes us less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

In order to keep jobs here, we've got to open up markets for our products. See, we open up markets for foreign goods. It's good for you we do. When you have more choices to choose from, you're likely to get the product you want at a better price and higher quality. But we want countries to treat us like we treat them, because America can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere so long as the playing field is level.

In order to keep jobs here, in order to make sure people can work, we've got to be wise about how we spend your money in Washington, and we must keep your taxes low. We have a difference of opinion in this campaign. I'm running against a fellow who has already promised \$2 trillion of new money, see. And we haven't even gotten to the stretch run yet. It's awfully tempting, coming down the pike, to tell people what they want to hear. It's awfully

easy to spend your money. And then they say, "Well, how are you going to pay for it?" He said, "Oh, just don't worry about it. We'll just tax the rich."

First of all, you can't raise the money, enough money to pay for his promises, by taxing the rich. Secondly, when you tax the rich, you're taxing nearly a million small-business owners, because they pay tax at the individual income-tax level. Thirdly, you've heard that rhetoric before, haven't you?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Yes. "Oh, don't worry, we'll tax the rich." Well, that's why the rich hire accountants and lawyers. Yes. They dodge; you pay. But we're not going to let him tax you, because we're going to win this election in November.

I'll tell you what else we ought to do on taxes. We need to simplify the Federal Tax Code. It is more than a million words long. It's full of special interest loopholes. In a new term, I will lead a bipartisan effort to make the Tax Code simpler, more fair, and good for the workers and the small-business owners of America.

Listen, we've got to do more to help our workers gain the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. That's why I know we need to double the number of people served by our job training programs and increase funding for our community college systems.

One other issue that's important, in terms of education, is that most new jobs are filled by people with at least 2 years of college, yet, one in four students gets there. That's why I believe we need early intervention programs to help students in high school. We want everybody to have the skills necessary to move on. We'll place a new focus on math and science in our high schools. Over time, we'll require a rigorous exam before graduation. By raising performance in our high schools and by expanding Pell grants for low-income and middle-income families, we will help more

Americans start their career with a college diploma.

In times of change, we've got to have a health care system that is available and affordable. More than one-half of the uninsured are small-business employees. That's because small businesses are having trouble with the cost of health care. To make sure that these families get the help they need, small firms must be allowed to join together to purchase insurance at the discounts available to big companies.

We want more people to own and manage their own health care plans, so we'll offer tax credits to expand health savings accounts. We'll ensure every poor county in America has a community or rural health center, to help those who need help with their primary care. And to make sure health care is available and affordable, we've got to do something about these junk lawsuits that are running docs out of business and running up the cost of your health care.

Right before I came in here, I met with a fellow named Steve Reintjes. He's a neurosurgeon from Kansas City. In 4 years, his premiums have increased from \$27,000 to about \$90,000. That's because he's having to practice defensive medicine. In other words, he's practicing medicine so that—just in case he gets sued. That's what docs are having to do all over this country. No one has ever been healed by a frivolous lawsuit in America. These frivolous lawsuits are running up the cost of your health care. They're making it harder for good docs to practice medicine. That's why we need medical liability reform—now.

There is a clear difference in this campaign on this issue. See, I don't think you can be pro-doctor, pro-hospital, pro-patient and pro-trial-lawyer at the same time. I think you have to choose. My opponent made his choice, and he put him on the ticket. [*Laughter*] I made my choice. I'm standing with the docs and patients all across America. In all we do, we'll make sure that the health decisions are made by

doctors and patients, not by bureaucrats in Washington, DC.

In changing times, it will help people have stability and hope in their lives if they own something. That's why we'll continue to expand homeownership in America. Do you realize the homeownership rate is at an alltime high in America? More and more people are owning their own home. More and more people are opening the door to where they live, and say, "Welcome to my home. Welcome to my piece of property."

As well we've got to make sure our pension plans reflect the realities of the world in which we live. Senior citizens do not have to worry about Social Security. It's not going to change for you. Baby boomers like me don't have to worry about Social Security. It's not going to change. But if you're a younger guy, our children and grandchildren, they'd better be worried about Social Security. There's not enough payers into the system to take care of those of us who are going to be receiving. They better worry about it. I believe younger workers ought to have the option of taking some of their own tax money and set up a personal savings account to help them with Social Security. It's a nest egg they call their own. It's a nest egg the Government cannot take away from them.

In this world of change, there are some things that aren't going to change, the beliefs that we—the values we try to live by, our basic beliefs, courage and compassion, reverence and integrity. In times of change, we must support institutions which give us stability, our families, our schools, our religious congregations.

We stand for a culture of life in which every person matters and every being counts. We stand for marriage and family, which are the foundations of our society. We support the religious charities and community-based organizations that provide a safety net of mercy and compassion. I stand for the appointment of Federal judges who know the difference between personal opinion and the strict interpretation of the law.

This election will also determine how America responds to the continuing threat of terrorism. Since that terrible morning of September the 11th, 2001, we fought the terrorists across the Earth, not for pride, not for power, but because the lives of our citizens are at stake. Our strategy is clear. We're defending the homeland. We're transforming our military. We're strengthening our intelligence services. We will stay on the offensive. We will strike the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home. We'll spread freedom and hope and opportunity throughout the world, and we will prevail.

Our strategy is succeeding. Four years ago, Afghanistan was a home base of Al Qaida; Pakistan was a transit point for terrorist groups; Saudi Arabia was fertile ground for terrorist fundraising; Libya was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons; Iraq was a gathering threat; and Al Qaida was largely unchallenged as it planned attacks. Because we acted, the Government of a free Afghanistan is fighting terror; Pakistan is capturing terrorist leaders; Saudi Arabia is making arrests; Libya is dismantling its weapons programs; the army of a free Iraq is fighting for freedom; and more than three-quarters of Al Qaida's key members and associates have been detained or killed. We have led. Many have joined, and America and the world are safer.

Progress involved careful diplomacy, clear moral purpose, and some tough decisions. And the toughest came on Iraq. We knew Saddam Hussein's records of aggression and his support for terror. We knew his long history of pursuing and even using weapons of mass destruction. We know that after September the 11th, our country must think differently. We must take threats seriously before they fully materialize.

In Saddam Hussein, we saw a threat. I went to the United States Congress. Members of the Congress looked at the same intelligence I looked at. They remembered the same history I remembered, and they came to the conclusion that Saddam

Hussein was a threat and authorized the use of force. My opponent looked at the same intelligence I looked at, and he voted yes when it came to the authorization of force.

Any time the Commander in Chief uses force, he must have exhausted all other options. I was hoping diplomacy would have solved this threat. So I went to the United Nations. I said, "You know, we see a threat." They looked at the same intelligence, remembered the same history, and concluded that Saddam Hussein must disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. That was a 15-to-nothing vote in the United Nations Security Council.

But as he had for over a decade, Saddam Hussein ignored the demands of the free world, see. He had been told this before. And he said—as a matter of fact, when they sent in inspectors, he systematically deceived them. So I had a choice to make at this time: Do I forget the lessons of September the 11th and take the word of a madman, or do I take action to defend this country? Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Because we acted to defend ourself, because we took action to make America a safer place, more than 50 million people in Afghanistan and Iraq are now free.

You know, it wasn't all that long ago, in Afghanistan, where many young girls didn't get to go to school because the leaders there were so backward. And their moms could be hauled out in the public square and whipped or killed because they didn't toe this barbaric line of reasoning. And yet, today, 10 million people have registered to vote in the upcoming Presidential election in Afghanistan.

Freedom is powerful, isn't it? It's powerful. In Iraq, there's a strong Prime Minister. There's a National Council. National elections are scheduled in January. The world is changing. We're standing with the

people of those countries, because when America gives its word, America must keep its word. When a President says something, he must mean it.

In serving this vital and historic cause that makes our country safer, we're changing the world. See, free societies in the Middle East will be hopeful societies which will no longer feed resentments and breed violence for export. Free governments in the Middle East will fight terrorists instead of harboring them. That makes us safer.

Our mission in Afghanistan is clear. We will help the new leaders train their armies so that citizens of Iraq and Afghanistan can defend themselves against the few who are trying to stop the march of liberty for the many. We'll help them get to elections. We'll get them on the path of stability and democracy as quickly as possible, and then our troops will return home with the honor they have earned.

I've had the privilege of meeting those who wear our uniform. I've seen their great decency and unselfish courage. I assure you, the cause of freedom is in really good hands. And I want to thank the veterans who are here, who have set such a fine example for the men and women of our military.

I made a commitment to our troops and our loved ones: They will have all the resources they need to complete their missions. That's why I went to the Congress a year ago, a year ago this month. I proposed \$87 billion in funding for body armor and spare parts, ammunition, fuel, and other supplies needed by our troops doing battle in Afghanistan and Iraq. We received great support in the Congress. As a matter of fact, the support was so strong that only 12 Members of the United States Senate voted against the funding, 2 of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Only four United States Senators voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against funding our troops.

Only four people did that, two of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. So they asked him, they said, what—you know, "How can you explain that?" He said, "Well, I actually did vote for the \$87 billion, before I voted against it."

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And then they said, you know—and he said, well, he's proud of his vote. And then he said, "Well, the whole thing is a complicated matter." [Laughter] Nothing complicated—there is nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

I think this country wants consistent, principled leadership. My opponent has now voted for the war and against supplying our troops. When he got on in the Democrat primary, he declared himself the antiwar candidate. More recently, he switched again, saying he would have voted for the war even knowing everything we know today. And he woke up yesterday morning with yet another new position. [Laughter] And this one is not even his own. [Laughter] It is that of his one-time rival, Howard Dean.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He even used the same words Howard Dean did back when he supposedly disagreed with him. [Laughter] No matter how many times Senator Kerry flip-flops, we were right to make America safer by removing Saddam Hussein from power.

It's also wrong for my opponent to denigrate the contributions of America's allies, who were standing side by side with our men and women in uniform risking their lives for freedom. There are over 40 nations in—nearly 40 nations in Afghanistan, some 30 in Iraq. Over the next 4 years, I'll continue to build and strengthen our alliances, but I will never turn over America's national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

Audience members. U.S.A! U.S.A!
U.S.A.!

The President. I believe in the transformational power of liberty. The wisest use of American strength is to advance freedom. I believe that because I've looked closely at our history. You know, I sit down with Prime Minister Koizumi from Japan. He is, obviously, running a country that—with whom we were at war, not all that long ago in the march of history. You know, my dad fought against the Japanese. I'm sure your dads and granddads did as well.

But because we believe in liberty, because we believe that Japan could self-govern and become a peaceful nation, because Harry Truman, of Missouri, stood strong in the belief that freedom could transform lives, because the American people had faith in our values, Japan became an ally. Liberty changed an enemy to a friend, and today, we sit down at the same table talking about how to keep the peace. Someday an American President will be sitting down with a duly elected leader of Iraq, talking about how to keep the peace, how to make the world a more peaceful place.

I also believe in the power of liberty to transform lives—I understand—because I understand that freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is the almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

This young century will be liberty's century. By promoting freedom at home and abroad, we will build a safer world and a more hopeful America. By transforming necessary systems that were designed in the past, we'll help Americans realize their dreams. Over the next 4 years, we'll spread ownership and opportunity to every corner of this country. We will pass the enduring values of our country to a young generation. We will continue to make the world a more free and peaceful place.

For all Americans, these years in our history will always stand apart. There are quiet times in the life of a nation when little is expected of its leaders. This isn't one of those times. This is a time when we need firm resolve, clear vision, and a deep faith in the values that make us a great nation.

None of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began. On September the 14th, 2001, I stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers. It's a day I will never forget. There were workers in hardhats there, yelling, "Whatever it takes." I was trying to do my best to thank and comfort the firefighters and policemen and the rescuers. A guy grabbed me by the arm, and he said, "Do not let me down." Ever since that day, I wake up every morning thinking about how to better protect our country. I will never relent in defending America, whatever it takes.

Four years ago, I traveled your great State asking for the vote. I said if you gave me the chance to serve, I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I had been elected. With your help, I will do so for 4 more years.

God bless. Thank you all for coming. Thank you for being here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:16 a.m. at Lee's Summit High School. In his remarks, he referred to Jeanne Patterson, candidate for Missouri's Fifth Congressional District; Chris Byrd, candidate for Missouri State Attorney General; Mayor Karen Messerli of Lee's Summit, MO; Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention; Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; former Democratic Presidential candidate Howard Dean; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

Remarks in a Discussion in Sedalia, Missouri
September 7, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for coming. Thank you all. Please be seated. It's such an honor to be here. Thanks for coming. I don't know if you know it, but we're on a bus tour. I'm out asking for the vote. I believe—I like coming directly to the people, and say, “I want your vote, and here's the reason why I think you ought to vote for me.” And that's what we're going to do today.

I thought we'd do it a little differently. I've got some things I want to share with you about what I'd like to accomplish during the next 4 years. And so we've asked some citizens to come and share some of their stories with you. I think that will help you understand why we have made decisions we have made and why we'll continue making certain types of decisions.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. You betcha. And then I'd like to answer some questions. Some of you may have a question or two on your mind, and I'd like to answer them for you.

Before I begin, I wish Laura were here. She is a wonderful lady. If I don't get too long-winded, I'm going to have dinner with her tonight. [Laughter] She was a—she was raised in Midland, Texas. That's where I was raised. And she was a public school librarian when I married her. And she said, “Fine, I'll marry you, just so long as I don't have to give any speeches.” [Laughter] Fortunately, she didn't—I said, “Fine, you don't ever have to give any speeches.” And so, fortunately, she didn't hold me to that promise that she wouldn't have to give any. She gave a magnificent speech in New York City the other night. I wasn't surprised. I wasn't surprised, because she's such a gentle soul. She's got a great heart. She's a wonderful mom, a terrific wife. I'm going to give you some reasons to put me back in there, but I think probably the most

important one of all so is that Laura is your First Lady for 4 more years.

The other thing—then I'm running with a good man. We've got a great ticket. Dick Cheney has done a heck of a job as the Vice President. I like to tease him by saying, “Well, you know, I admit it, he's not the prettiest face in the race.” [Laughter] But I didn't pick him because of his looks. I picked him because of his judgment, his experience, and the fact that he can get the job done. He's a great Vice President. And I'm proud to be running with him. Proud to be running with him.

I want to thank my uncle Bucky Bush who is with us. He's a Missouri native—or citizen, right here, from St. Louis. I want to thank Charlie Kruse—where is Charlie? Oh, Charlie, God bless you, sir. Our prayers are with you. He's a good man. I've known Charlie for quite a while. He said—when I was campaigning in 2000, he said, “Whatever you do, do not forget the Missouri farmer.” He said, “You keep that river open for our products.” And we did. And I hadn't forgotten the Missouri farmer. The farm economy is strong, and we intend to keep it that way. I'm going to talk a little bit about that as we go on.

I appreciate the mayor being here, Mayor Wasson. Thanks for coming. Where are you, Mayor? I appreciate you. Glad you're here. Thanks for your hospitality. Tell your fire and policemen—firefighters and policemen how thankful we are for their service to your community.

And thank all the people who are involved with politics, the grassroots activists. Those are the people who put up the signs and make the phone calls and register people to vote. I'm here to ask you to—at this stage of the campaign, I'm going around to your State today and around our country asking people to participate in the political process. In a free society, I believe